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SOME OBSERVATIONS UPON TIKKUN SOPHERIM.

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The July (1887) number of *HEBRAICA* contains an important article on תיקון סופרים *correction or emendation of the scribes*, by Rev. Mr. Crane, of Princeton, N. J. The number of passages in the Hebrew Bible said to have been corrected by the scribes is eighteen, running from Genesis to Malachi.

The author gives both what is stated to have been the original text of these passages, and also the present Massoretic reading, upon which he comments, and reaches the following conclusion: "If it be proven that the scribes have, in truth, made one single correction in the original writings in the places designated as *Tikkun Sopherim*, then their whole line of defense must fall to the ground; for it is no longer entitled to the least credence, and the value of each *Tikkun* must be determined solely by the weight of evidence in its favor, in each individual case, totally irrespective of any statements or explanations handed down by personally interested scribes. *Falsus in uno falsus in omnibus* is a well-established principle of legal evidence for determining the credibility of witnesses, and it is equally applicable to the case in hand."

This bears hard on the fidelity of the scribes, and if accepted in all its breadth, it will throw great doubt on the correctness of the Massoretic text, and, indeed, on the Old Testament text in general, as nobody, in that case, can tell how many passages the scribes have altered. We shall give the facts of the case as far as we know them, and then what seem to be the inferences to be drawn from them.

The oldest reference made to passages of the Old Testament as corrected by the scribes, occurs in the *Mechilta*, a commentary embracing a number of chapters of the Book of Exodus, written down in Hebrew in the *first half of the third century*.¹ The passages are found on Exod. xv. 7, and are only eleven in number, in the following order: (1) Zech. ii. 12 (A. V. 8); (2) Mal. i. 13; (3) 1 Sam. iii. 13; (4) Job vii. 20; (5) Hab. i. 12; (6) Jer. ii. 11; (7) Ps. cvi. 20; (8) Num. xi. 15; (9) 2 Sam. xx. 1; (10) Ezek. viii. 17; (11) Num. xii. 12.² Another Jewish work, the *Talkut*, belonging to the *thirteenth century*, gives the same emended passages except number 4 (Job. vii. 20). The *Sifre*, a Jewish commentary on Numbers and Deuteronomy, written in the *third century*, gives only *seven* passages as corrected

¹ This is the date assigned by Dr. Weber ("System der Altsyn. Paläst. Theol.," Leipzig, 1880), and about the date assigned to it by Dr. Zunz ("Gottesdienst Vorträge der Juden," pp. 46, 7).

² The passages are given by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Geiger ("Urschrift und Uebersetzungen der Bibel," Breslau, 1857, p. 309). This is the date assigned by Dr. Weber ("Altsyn. Paläst. Theol.," Leipzig, 1880, p. 21). In Abraham Geiger, p. 309.

by the scribes, viz., numbers 1, 4, 10, 5, 7 and 11 of the *Mechilta*, without stating what the original reading was. In the *Tanchuma*, a Jewish commentary on the Pentateuch, written in the *ninth*¹ century, the number of the passages stated to have been corrected by the scribes, is considerably enlarged. In Geiger's list we find five emended passages more than we have in the *Mechilta*, making sixteen. These five passages are: Hosea. iv. 7; Job xxxii. 3; Gen. xviii. 22; Lam. iii. 20; 2 Sam. xvi. 12. The Talmudists, according to Dr. Geiger, say but little respecting these emended passages. The reason he assigns is, that the corrected text had not yet obtained authority. In the *Tractat Sopherim*² there is no mention of these passages. "On the contrary, the oldest Massora known to us, found in the manuscript of Odessa of the year 916, contains them. Here the expression Tikkun Sopherim 'correction of the scribes' has become fixed, and the number of passages is definitely given as eighteen. These eighteen passages, which are indicated merely through single words and with which the original reading is not given, correspond for the most part with those of *Tanchuma*, only three of them being wanting, namely, Hosea iv. 7; Lam. iii. 20 and 2 Sam. xvi. 12. On the other hand, one number which contains the passage, 1 Kgs. xii. 16, with its parallel passage, 2 Chron. x. 16, is reckoned as four, as each of them contains two corrections, and two are added, namely, Mal. i. 12, indicated by מחללים, and iii. 8 or 9 by קובעים. Finally, the Massora as we read it in our editions, both at the beginning of Numbers and on Ps. cvi. 20, gives also the number of eighteen words which have been corrected by the scribes."³

Here the question arises, *Who* were the scribes that corrected the passages? The *Tanchuma* states that it was done by the men of the *Great Synagogue*, that is, a council of scribes in Jerusalem, consisting of one hundred and twenty members, the period of whose activity extended from Ezra to the death of the high priest Simon (B. C. 196), a period of about two hundred and fifty years.⁴ But it will be remembered that the *Tanchuma*, named from its author, was written in the *ninth* century after Christ, more than a thousand years after the close of the Great Synagogue that is said to have made the changes in the original readings of certain texts. Such a late statement does not appear to us to be worth much. The statement of a Christian writer of the eleventh or twelfth century respecting original readings of passages in the gospels or changes that were made in the *second* century would have but little weight with us. Gutbir inserted in his edition of the Peshitto Syriac New Testament (Hamburg, 1664) the passage containing the three heavenly witnesses (1 John v. 7), and remarks in his critical notes: "Since it is known [sic!] that the Arians spared in this place neither the Greek text itself, nor the oriental versions, we have inserted this verse, wanting in other

¹ The date given by Dr. Zunz ("Gottesdienst Vorträge der Juden," p. 237).

² Written about the *ninth* century it would seem. Dr. Zunz, p. 377.

³ "Urschrift und Uebersetzungen der Bibel," by Rabbi Abraham Geiger, pp. 311, 312.

⁴ See Talmud *Baba Batra*, and Fürst ("Ueber den Kanon," pp. 21-23).

editions, from the notes of Tremellius." Does any biblical scholar now believe that the original epistle of John contained that verse? We at least hope not. Assertions of this kind are to be received with great caution. Now in regard to the number of the passages of the Old Testament said to have been corrected, there is no uniformity of statement, as we have already seen. Nor in the passage from the *Mechilta* quoted by Geiger, is there any mention made of corrections by the Great Synagogue.

Let us now look at the passages said by *Tanchuma* to have been corrected by the Great Synagogue, in the light of the history of the text in those passages, to ascertain, if possible, whether the original text was in fact changed. We begin with Gen. xviii. 22, "And Abraham was still standing before Yahweh." The original reading is stated to have been, "Yahweh was still standing before Abraham." But we have proof that our present reading goes back to B. C. 330. For the Samaritan Pentateuch has the same order as the Massoretic text, **ואברהם לפני יהוה**..... The LXX. has the same, Ἀβραὰμ δὲ ἔτι ἦν ἑστῆς ἐναντίον Κυρίου. The Targum of Onkelos has the same arrangement, **ואברהם קדם**.....; also the Peshitto Syriac contains the same position, **ܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ**..... In the *Bereshith Rabba*, a commentary on Genesis written in the sixth¹ century, we have the following respecting this passage: "And they went towards Sodom; but Abraham still stood before the Eternal. The latter is, according to R. Simon, a correction of the scribes; (for it cannot be well supposed) that the Shekinah waited for Abraham."² This is the first reference to a correction of this text, and it rests on the statement of R. Simon, who, according to Dr. Zunz,³ lived about A. D. 166, that is about *three hundred and fifty* years after the close of the Great Synagogue; so that, if the text in Genesis was corrected by these men, it must have been done before B. C. 330,⁴ the latest date to which we can assign the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Hebrew manuscripts exhibit no variation of text in the passage.⁵

The next passage in order is Num. xi. 15, "And let me not see *my wretchedness*" (**ברעתי**, emended, it is said, for **ברעתך thy evil**). But our present reading is supported by the Samaritan Pentateuch, which has **ברעתי**; the LXX., which has τὴν *κάκωσίν μου*; the Peshitto Syriac, which reads **ܠܝ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ** *my wretchedness*; and Onkelos, who renders it **כבישתי my misery**. No Hebrew MS. gives a different reading of the word.⁶ In Num. xii. 12, we have, "Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb." In this passage it is alleged that **אמו** *his mother* has been substituted

¹ This is the date assigned to it by Dr. Weber, "Altsyn. Paläst. Theol.," p. xxiii.

² Dr. Aug. Wünsche's German translation of "Bereshith Rabba," p. 233.

³ "Gottesdienst Vorträge," p. 46.

⁴ This is the date assigned to it by De Wette, who is skeptical enough on all these points.

⁵ This is manifest from Doederlein's edition of the Hebrew Bible, accompanied with a large collection of readings from the collations of Kennicott and De Rossi, Leipzig, 1793.

⁶ So far at least as noticed in Doederlein's edition.

for **אִמּוֹ** *our mother*; and **בִּשְׂרֹ** *his flesh*, for **בִּשְׂרֵנוּ** *our flesh*. But here again our Massoretic text is supported by the Samaritan Pentateuch, and substantially by the LXX., which has “her flesh,” and “womb of mother,” where “her” must be supplied from the context. The Peshitto Syriac has “his mother” and “his flesh.” Here one of Kennicott’s MSS. has **אִמּוֹ**, and another, **אִמּוֹ**; and two have **בִּשְׂרֵנוּ**, showing that there were different readings of the text in early times. The number of alleged corrections in the Pentateuch—by counting Num. XII. 12, as two—is four; and we see no good reason to believe that our Massoretic text does not give us the original reading.

The next alleged correction in order in the Hebrew Bible, is 1 Sam. III. 13, the substitution of **לָהֶם** for **לִי**, making the passage read that the sons of Eli “cursed themselves” (i. e., “brought a curse upon themselves”), instead of “cursing me” (that is, God). Here the LXX. reads *κακολογούντες θεόν reviling God*. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel agrees very well with the Hebrew text, while the Peshitto Syriac has, “His sons were treating with contempt the people” (**לְחַכְּתָּא**). One of Kennicott’s MSS. reads **לִי** *me*, instead of **לָהֶם** *them*. The original reading here seems to be very doubtful. In the account of the wicked deeds of the sons of Eli, no mention is made of direct blasphemy. We see no good reason to think that the scribes would have changed **לִי** to **לָהֶם** in order to mitigate the crime of Eli’s sons.

“It may be that Yahweh will look upon my affliction” (**בְּעֵינִי**, K^{ri} **בְּעֵינִי**), 2 Sam. XVI. 12. Buxtorf remarks that “the Massorah in both places¹ quotes this passage; it is also reviewed in the book *Tanchuma* but in what word the correction consists they do not explain. The commentators also here make no mention of a correction,”² etc. Now if the original reading was, “It may be that Yahweh will look with *his eye* (**בְּעֵינִי**) and requite” etc., it is strange that there is in the whole Hebrew Bible no other similar construction as seeing *with* (one) *eye*; but we find the phrase, “With thine eyes (**בְּעֵינֶיךָ**) shalt thou behold” (Ps. XCI. 8). And the reading K^{thibh} **בְּעֵינִי** after **רָאָה** is similar to what we find in Gen. XXIX. 32, and also in other places, in which **ב** is prefixed to a noun after this verb. If we take the Massoretic reading **בְּעֵינִי** (K^{thibh}) and render it “upon my misery,” giving to **עוֹן** the same sense which Gesenius gives the word in Ps. XXXI. 11, which the context absolutely requires, we shall have no difficulty. The LXX. and the Peshitto Syriac agree well with this rendering, the former having *ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει*, and the latter, **صَعْبِي** *upon my humiliation*. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel has “tears of my eye.” In this passage the Hebrew MSS. give a variety of readings both as K^{thibh} and K^{ri}.

“To your tents, O Israel; now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto *their tents*” (1 Kgs. XII. 16). Here the Massoretic text has **לְאֹהֲלֶיךָ**

¹ That is where the lists of the words are given.

² Chal. Rab. Tal. Lex., col. 2631.

shows that our present reading is correct; and it is very unlikely that God would say, "I will change my glory into shame." The LXX. agrees with the Massoretic text, and the Peshitto Syriac has, "They have turned their honor into shame," which is also the reading of the Targum.

"Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die" (Hab. i. 12). According to *Tanchuma*, as given both by Rabbi Levy¹ and Dr. Geiger,² the original reading of **לֹא נָמוּת** "we shall not die" was **לֹא יָמוּת** "he will not die." The LXX. reads, οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνομεν. The Peshitto reads, "That we may not die³ thou art the Lord;" that is, "thou art the Lord, so that we shall not die." "No codex has the reading **תָּמוּת**"⁴ (thou shalt die), that is, **לֹא תָמוּת**. The Massoretic reading makes good sense, "Because thou art the eternal and holy God, we shall be saved." Quite in the same line is the language of Christ, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

"For thus saith the Lord of hosts, After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye," **עֵינִי** (Zech. ii. 8), said to have been corrected from **עֵינִי** *my eye*. But in both readings the reference is to the divine eye, so that the anthropomorphism is not avoided. The LXX. and the Peshitto Syriac have "his eye." Two of Kennicott's MSS. read **עֵינִי** *my eye*.

"Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at (contemned) it, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. i. 13). In this passage it is said that **אוֹתִי** *me* has been changed into **אוֹתוֹ** *it*, after "ye have snuffed at." We, however, see nothing incongruous in our Massoretic text. In the previous verse the Israelites are charged with profaning the name of the LORD by saying that the table (the altar) of Yahweh is polluted, and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible, and ye have contemned it, (that is, the altar). The LXX. has "I have blown them away," and the Peshitto Syriac, "thou hast blown upon it."⁵

"Why hast thou set me as a mark against thee so that I am a burden to myself" (**עָלַי**), said to have been changed from **עָלֶיךָ** *to thee*, i. e., *a burden to thee* (Job. vii. 20). But the Massoretic reading also in this passage, makes good sense and fits the context. The last part may be rendered, "Why hast thou (God) made me a mark (subject of attack) for thyself so that I am a burden to myself?" The LXX. and the Syriac read, "I am a burden to myself."

"They found no answer, and yet had condemned Job" (Job xxxii. 3). In this passage it is alleged that the original was **הָאֱלֹהִים** which was changed to

¹ "Chaldäisches Wörterbuch," vol. II., p. 554.

² "Urschrift und Uebersetz.," p. 310.

³ The Peshitto has **لَمُوت** evidently a typographical error for **لَمُوت** "n'muth."

⁴ Doederlein's ed. Heb. Bib., with readings.

⁵ The unpointed text **הַפְּחַתְּם** seems to have led astray both the LXX. and the Syriac translators. The first takes it as first person singular, and the latter as second singular, with a pronominal affix.

אִיוֹב and that the text read, "They condemned God." But the context certainly requires the Massoretic reading: "They had condemned Job," and this is the sense both of the LXX. and the Syriac, and the Hebrew MSS. show no deviation from the Massoretic text.

"Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass," (Ps. CVI. 20). In this passage, it is alleged that the original *his glory* **כְּבוֹדוֹ** has been changed into **כְּבוֹדֵם** *their glory*. It is true that the worshipers of the golden calf did—so far as men could—change the glory of God into the likeness of an ox, and the Psalmist might have so expressed it, just as Paul says respecting the heathen that they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man," etc. (Rom. I. 23). But the Psalmist may have preferred a less direct statement and have written "their glory (i. e. the glorious object of their worship) they turned into the likeness of an ox." In Gen. XXXI. 53 we have an instance of this indirect method of statement: "And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac," that is the Almighty whom Isaac feared. But why should we suppose that the scribes changed the text? If they had scruples about the statement that the glory of God had been turned into the likeness of an ox, why might not the Psalmist have had similar scruples? Both the LXX. and the Syriac have "their glory," from which there is no deviation in the Hebrew MSS.

"My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me" (Lam. III. 20). The change said to have been made in this passage is the substitution of **נַפְשִׁי** for **נַפְשֶׁךָ** that is *in my soul* (self) instead of *thyself*. This presupposes that the passage originally had an entirely different meaning from that given in the English Version. "Remember (me) and bow *thyself* down to me," would be the rendering. The LXX. reads: καταδολεσχῆσαι ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἡ ψυχὴ μου, which favors the Massoretic text. The Peshitto Syriac translates it: "Renew (**נָסַח**) my soul in me," which presupposes the Massoretic reading in the word under discussion. The Hebrew MSS. give no variation of reading respecting the word. It is not likely that the verb **שָׁח** in the Hiph'il form, with a transitive meaning, was used by Jeremiah to express God's *bowing himself down*. Besides, in the present passage, the word occurs but twice in the Hebrew Bible, viz., in "her house *sinks down* into death" (Prov. II. 18); and in "our soul *is bowed down* in the dust" (Ps. XLIV. 25). When God is called upon to hearken to men's wants, the language is, "Incline thine ear to me," Pss. XVII. 6; XXXI. 3, etc., or "bow the heavens," etc. The Hiph'il of **נָסַח** is used in these passages. No good reason can be assigned for the rejection of the Massoretic reading.

We conclude with the following reflections upon the whole subject:

1. The statement that the scribes, that is, the men of the Great Synagogue (B. C. 444–196), made changes in the original text to remove anthropomorphisms or anthropopathisms, or any unseemly expressions, is not found until *three hun-*

dred and fifty years after the Great Synagogue. The list is not uniform, and the entire number, eighteen, is not given until about *eleven hundred years* after the close of this famous council of Jewish scholars. Besides this, the statement is too indefinite. No unprejudiced Christian scholar would consider statements of a similar character in reference to changes in the New Testament, of any value.

Can any one believe that the men of the Great Council—said to be one hundred and twenty in number—deliberately voted to change what they believed Moses wrote? Their reverence for the *Torah* would have prevented them from altering any well-established reading. Their motto was “Put a hedge about the Law and make disciples.” They were traditionists. Nor do we think they would have changed the language of the prophets in whose inspiration they believed. Various readings, no doubt, existed in different MSS. of the Hebrew Bible long before the time of Christ, and the School of Ezra may have labored in settling the Old Testament text. But were they less scrupulous than their later disciples, the Massorites, who would not correct manifest errors in the text, but simply indicated the corrections by marginal notes? The men of the Great Synagogue and their followers in the subsequent ages, may have made some mistakes, it is true, in their textual criticism.

Is there any good reason to believe that the Christians of antiquity changed any part of what they believed to be the original text of the New Testament? Have the Mohammedans altered their Qoran?

These remarks will have but little weight with those critics who believe that Ezra wrote a part of the Pentateuch, and that Deuteronomy was forged in the name of Moses, seven or eight centuries after that lawgiver; and that various documents entering into the Pentateuch were worked over in the time of Ezra, or at an earlier period. In that case, why did they not throw out the passage in the Pentateuch which represents Aaron, their first great highpriest, as making a golden calf for idolatrous worship? This fact in Aaron’s history, gave the old masters in Israel the greatest amount of trouble.¹ Neither have the scribes expunged from the text the blunder of Moses, nor the crimes of David and Solomon, nor the crimes and idolatries of the Israelitish people in general. Is there any other history in the world that can be compared in point of fidelity to that in the Bible, in which the vices and crimes of the people are so faithfully described by the pen of their own historians and so carefully preserved in their archives to their own infamy? Well did Sir Isaac Newton remark that he found more sure marks of truth in the Bible than in any profane book whatever.

2. Passages of an anthropomorphic and of an anthropopathic character in the Hebrew Bible have certainly been allowed by the scribes to stand. Thus we have, “They heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden” (Gen. iii. 8); “He (God) kept him as the apple of his (God’s) eye” (Deut. xxxii. 10); “He

¹ See Weber’s “System Altsyn. Paläst. Theol.,” pp. 264-6.

runneth upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of (the Almighty's) buckler" (Job xv. 26); "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Gen vi. 6). If such expressions as these, and others that might be named, the scribes have allowed to stand, it is not likely that they would have modified others that were not more offensive.

3. The principle, *false in one, false in all*, cannot be safely applied, either in regard to human testimony or written documents. A witness may be unreliable in matters in which the truth militates against his own interests, while in other cases in which his self-interest is not affected, his testimony may be believed. A man may be insane on one subject and perfectly sane on all others. So far as pertains to the Old Testament scribes, it seems clear that they were too conscientious to make changes that would diminish Israel's disgrace or augment his honor. In matters pertaining to the Deity, a zeal for his glory might be supposed to lead them to suppress what they thought derogatory to his character in the representations of his actions given in Hebrew history. But we see no proof that anything of the kind was ever done. *Pious* fraud had no place among the ancient Hebrews.